

LONG ISLAND FORUM



Wading River Station in 1905. A Fullerton Photo
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**THE
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FORUM**

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FOR LONG ISLANDERS EVERYWHERE

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Julian Denton Smith, Roy E. Lott

L. I. Railroad History

I saw Mr. Wells' plea in the
Forum for a history of the LIRR,
but Mr. Klaber wrote you before
I got around to it. Here are the
facts.

When the Railroad was new,
some historians (Thompson and
Prime, for instance) considered it
of sufficient importance to mention
it, but for several decades, it got
little mention. The railroad of
those days was very crude. 12 to
15 miles per hour seems to have
been the usual speed of trains. As
late as 1859, the engineman that
met disaster at Willow Tree was
accused of contributing to the
wreck because he was "speeding
at 20 mph". Evidently 20 mph was
considerably in excess of the usual
speed. Not only was the service
slow, but it was very unreliable.
Engine break-downs were frequent.
It is hard to realize nowadays that
in those days, if an engine broke
down, there was nothing to do but
sit there and wait for the next
train to come along—which might
take three or four hours, as there
were only four or five trains a day.
There was no telegraph or tele-
phone. In event of a wreck or
other disaster, a horse had to be
found, and a man on horse-back
sent to summon help.

Under these conditions, the
horse-drawn stages were able to
compete with the railroad. While
no one took a stage from Brook-
lyn to Riverhead or Greenport,
almost all short haul transpor-
tation was by stage, and the stages
competed actively with the railroad
at the more populated western end
of the island—for example, between
Brooklyn and Jamaica. Then, too,
the Railroad reached only a very
few large towns, such as Jamaica
and Hempstead. None of the north
shore villages, such as Flushing,
Roslyn, Oyster Bay, Huntington,
Northport, or Port Jefferson were
served, and none of the south
shore villages.

Continued on page 8

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The Cenacle, Maude Adams' Gift

THE Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle at Ronkonkoma has been a retreat for Roman Catholic nuns only since 1922. It is the quondam retreat of Maude Adams, who in the heyday of her histrionic career had no peer as an enchantress on the American stage. The estate was purchased with part of her earnings from "The Little Minister," the drama that catapulted her into theatrical success and the one in which she made her first Metropolitan appearance as a star on September 27, 1897. It represents, crystallized into real estate, her success as Lady Babbie in Barrie's play.

At the time she purchased the estate in 1900, the farm contained eighty acres and a low, square, brown house. The house had been built over one hundred years before by one of the Smithtown Smith families, who were slave-holders in bygone days. In 1901 Joseph S. Dressler, her manager, succeeded in acquiring for her at public auction for \$1,500 the adjoining estate, containing about 131 acres. By subsequent purchases of adjoining land through the years, she finally increased the size of the farm to 300 acres. She called it "Sandy Garth," a name suggested by her predilection for Scotch customs, confirmed by her literary travels among the scenes of Barrie's books and plays. "Here I live!" she once exclaimed contentedly to one of her few friends. She might, appositely enough, have added, "Here I hide!"

Despite the facts that she was a star at twenty-four, the wealthiest of living actresses at thirty, and the most widely admired female performer in the theater at thirty-four, it would be difficult to select from the annals of the American stage a woman about whom less was known. She invariably rejected invitations to social functions, never granted newspaper interviews, traveled incognito on trips abroad, and led the life of a semi-recluse. The curtain in the final act signalized for her the end of public contact. What she said and did out of character parts and off the stage were

Dr. Charles A. Huguenin

shrouded from public ears and eyes. "I don't see," she argued, "why an actress must give her personality to the world, though it seems to be expected, and those who curiously investigate her private life are not always careful how they use their information." Only once did she command the spotlight of publicity by taking sides on a civic issue. In March of 1906, after the sale to New York City of the old Long Island Normal School on the Heights at Jamaica, she clashed with Mrs. Mackay over the prospective location of a new school. She maintained that Ronkonkoma, rather than Mineola, was the logical place for the establishment of another institution.

Her zeal for privacy manifested itself upon at least one occasion in an eccentric form of conduct. When a carriage-load of New Yorkers drove across "Sandy Garth" in the hope of catching a glimpse of their beloved, diffident Lady Babbie, she hid behind a tree until the group had departed. A tear in her riding habit probably contributed in no small measure to a veritable passion for seclusion in this one instance.

Instances in which acquaintances pierced the wall of reserve about

her were rare, but it seems to have been accomplished by a conductor on the Long Island Railroad on one occasion when Miss Adams was traveling to Ronkonkoma. During the third year of the run of "The Little Minister," the sympathetic conductor asked the celebrated actress if repeated performances of the same part in the play had not palled upon her.

"It is tiresome," the star admitted.

The conductor lost himself in reflection for many minutes as he leaned against the back of the car seat. At last, he blurted out in sudden inspiration, "Miss Adams, why don't you try to get another job?" The thought of abandoning a work to which she was wedded with her whole soul struck her as absurdly humorous whenever she recounted the incident.

If Maude Adams devoted all her working hours to the stage, she spent most of her leisure ones at "Sandy Garth." In November of 1903 Gustav Kobbe wrote for the Ladies' Home Journal. "She cares more for Ronkonkoma than for Thrums; for the fields on her farm than for the Field of Wagoram; and for her St. Bernards, her horses, her pigs and her chickens than for the neighbors on Quality Street." The peaceful farm ex-



"Sandy Garth," Maude Adams' Hideaway

erted so powerful an appeal to the tired actress that every Saturday night during New York engagements she repaired to it aboard a special train awaiting her at Long Island City. On Monday she reluctantly tore herself away from Ronkonkoma at the last moment for her to be on time for a Monday night's performance. From points as remote as Philadelphia, and sometimes even from Boston, the farm drew her like a magnet for week-ends in bucolic surroundings. She once wrote: "I do think spring is more lovely in Long Island than any place I know."

What she would have done with her life if the stage had not laid claim to it very early is a matter of conjecture. One commentator thought that she would have turned Catholic, would have taken the veil, and would have passed her years in the hushed calm of a nunnery. Another commentator maintained that she would have devoted her entire time to farming. The weight of evidence seems to rest on the latter surmise. In an article in the "Good Housekeeping Magazine" for October of 1906 appeared this statement: "She makes no secret of saying that next to being a good actress, she would wish to be a good farmer." Certainly she took an active part in the husbandry of her estate. She sold wood, pigs, poultry, and corn. Her familiarity with the details of farm management stamped her as an authority on stock and crops, and the men in her employ frequently consulted her in regard to their work. A shrewd Yankee farmer never haggled for a hog nor bargained for a horse.

She acknowledged having been cheated only once. The farmer was Bernard Rheinold, a theatrical manager, who owned an adjoining farm. From him she purchased a cow without knowing that the animal refused to be milked by a stranger. All the hired hands failed ignominiously in attempts to milk her, and some reported their failure nursing bruised faces and other evidences of having incurred the displeasure of the recalcitrant animal. Miss Adams finally felt constrained to return the cow. "That's the longest she's been away from home," Rheinold frankly avowed. "Yet, I have sold her regularly every week."

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Weekend at Fire Island Pines

OUR barrier beaches are fascinating anytime of the year and especially Fire Island Beach in the fall.

It was my very good fortune to spend the last weekend of October at Fire Island Pines. The sun hardly shone enough to throw a decent shadow for picture taking. Finally a soft rain fell just before the last ferry on Sunday. Rain or shine the place was beautiful.

Fire Island Pines is a new community about a mile and a half to the east of Cherry Grove. It is at the site of the original Fishermen's Path and one of the streets now bears that historical name. An entrance channel and harbor have been dredged and dockage assigned to property owners. Ferry service is out of Sayville.

I doubt that it is safe to say transportation exists at Fire Island Pines. The old up-dune-and-down lane running east and west, used by the coast guard in earlier days, is now two deep sandy ruts and labelled "Fire Island Boulevard" in anticipation of Fire Island's connection by roadway and bridges to the mainland. Six or seven sawed-off, re-styled, aged autos are able to navigate this haphazard thoroughfare hauling building materials. At various points the cars have an approach to the beach front and then can run quickly from one island community to the next.

The Town of Brookhaven built and maintains a network of boardwalks at The Pines. The boardwalks are five or six feet wide and vary from one to six feet above ground according to the contour. Narrower walks lead to the cottages. Boardwalks, houses, stores and hotel are built on stilts — locust posts. Sometimes the posts are so thick beneath buildings that they form a forest.

At least one express wagon goes with every house at The Pines. These are used to haul everything moveable along the boardwalks. In returning to the mainland it is customary to carry luggage on the express wagons to the ferry, and then push the empty wagons under

Julian Denton Smith

the boardwalk so as to be handy for the next haul from ferry to cottage.

I have gone off the edges and walked off the ends of the boardwalks without injury. There are no street lights of any kind and nights are terribly dark sometimes. The danger of stepping from boardwalks could be reduced by painting a two-inch strip of white on all edges, ends and steps. A friend of mine thinks all the paint in the world could not keep him on a boardwalk at night if he was coming from the bar at The Pines.

Before Sunday breakfast I hiked down the beach to Cherry Grove. A dozen or more fishermen were surf casting. They moved along the beach in the earlier-model, all-purpose autos. Several dogs of indefinite and uncertain parentage accompanied the men and lent a boisterous, rollicking, holiday air to the sober sport of fishing.

The fishing efforts were not without reward as I saw one fisherman lugging home three big bluefish and a striped bass that must have weighed ten or twelve pounds. I did not know that bluefish remained in our waters to the end of October, but there they were.

I have never seen so much color in cat briers. They are every bit as brilliant and varied as poison ivy. Huckleberries spread in pinks and reds. The beach plums were

purplish browns and orange. The oaks carried the thicker tones we know in our own yards. Sassafras and wild cherries specialized in yellows, tans and pale greens. The beach grass and golden rod showed yellowish, the latter occasionally sporting a late-season plume of startling gold. The native sweet-scented white azaleas were leafless.

I found one clump of a lilac-colored aster in full bloom. It was so completely surrounded by poison ivy that I kept my distance. Surely this was the New York aster, the willow-leaved blue aster, altho I hedged in getting close enough to make a fool-proof identification . . . poison ivy is no friend of mine.

No one realizes how much holly grows on the barrier beaches until it and the pines are the only real green in the landscape. Holly occurs in all stages of growth from year-old seedlings to old-timers with trunks a foot in diameter. The percentage of female trees, berry bearers, is high and the fruit shines with a bright red in generous clusters. The pines are usually the tallest trees on the beach. They are of soft wood and become shaped and pruned by the winds. They seldom attain much age. Cones of many years litter the ground beneath the pines. The tanner the cone, the more recently it has fallen.

A half-acre cranberry bog at The Pines is fenced off as a permanent



preserve. About forty species of plants may be identified in the tiny area. One of the most showy is the Pink Pogonia, an orchid blooming in June. The flower appears locally on Long Island and usually in the acid condition of a cranberry bog.

The cottage in which I visited stands high up on stilts so the living rooms are actually at a second floor level to give a view of the ocean beyond the row of high dunes. As nearly as I can remember this was the first time I had been high enough to look down on marsh hawks to see the patch of white at the base of the tail. The patch appears on both males and females.

My hostess heats her entire cottage with a Portland stove set up in the large living-dining-kitchen-bedroom combination. The stove is wood burning and throws heat in every direction. The flue pipe goes straight up and out through the roof radiating heat every inch of the way. Dry wood came from piles beneath the house. I replenished with driftwood from the beach, the bay, and wherever I discovered sticks not nailed down. I am sure this will be dry and burnable the next time the stove is put in service. Cooking, refrigeration and light is by bottled gas. Every cottage pumps water by a gasoline motor.

Birds are quite unafraid on the barrier beach. Wood thrush, myrtle warblers, catbirds and robins did not seem to care if I edged in for

an inquisitive close-up. A woodcock with the long needle-like bill ran out from under a broadwalk and stood watching me apparently as interested in my outlandishly conspicuous red shirt as I was in his undetailed camouflaging color scheme.

I walked back to Cherry Grove later in the day and with better light for pictures of some of the house names on the cottages. I did not see a single "Dew Drop Inn" — a name that has gone stale through overuse. One sign that caught my eye and charged me with unholly glee was "Half Hacienda." A block or so west of the new hotel is a steep glen now completely covered with ivy — not poison ivy but the evergreen kind, the one that stays green all winter. Some very thoughtful person of perhaps the preceding generation set out that ivy to hold the walls of the glen in place. It has accomplished the purpose and done it with magnificence.

Everywhere along the north side of the barrier beach the bay was jam-packed with eelgrass. It massed from shore out forty or fifty feet. The continuous northeast wind roughed the water with big waves and white caps. These became entirely lost in the welter of eelgrass. The waves smothered to such an extent that the wash line at the shore barely varied an inch. With quantities of eelgrass returned to the bay plenty of ducks should set down with us this fall and winter.

Continued on page 8

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More About L. I. Whaling

Various reasons for the sudden termination of Long Island's whaling industry have been advanced. These include the alleged scarcity of whales, the discovery of mineral oil and the California Gold Rush. Nevertheless, whales were plentiful, as evidenced by a \$995,000 "take" in 1847; likewise, the first oil well (at Titusville, Pennsylvania) was not opened until 1859, nor did the east coast exodus to California occur until 1849, more than a year after the majority of Sag Harbor's whaleship owners decided that they had had enough and would make no further investments in the industry.

Viewed from this angle, Long Island whaling may be said to have committed suicide. Many another industry, may a business concern faced with an equally grave situation in which further capital was essential, has increased its investment, adopted more efficient methods and successfully come through. There are those who reason that had this been done in the case of Long Island whaling, the industry could have continued with profit for another generation at least and possibly much longer.

As it was, when in 1847 a near-million dollar gross return failed to show a substantial net profit because whaling ships had had to sail too far and be away too long in order to fill their holds, the owners, with few exceptions decided to quit the game. Ship after ship was sold into other pursuits. Some became coal barges; some freighters. A number were left idly at anchor, remaining unpainted and neglected until impressed a year or more later into the "rush" to California. Within a very few years the once important Long Island whaling fleet was completely dispersed. So, too, were the men engaged in the devious branches of the industry, such as owners, agents, brokers and hundreds of self-employed who operated kindred business concerns.

As for the whaling skippers and sailors who numbered thousands of Long Islanders, they found themselves left high and dry. Many took up fishing, some went in for farm-

Paul Bailey

ing, but a large number remained unemployed except for odd jobs. To such men the California Gold Rush, coming after months of uncertainty and in many cases idleness, was a siren call indeed. To men who had rounded the Horn and sailed the Seven Seas, the west coast was not far away. Many of them had glimpsed the mountains, bays and beaches of the Far West from the deck of a whaleship. Cal- low youths who had hoped to take up whaling accepted the westward trek as a substitute.

Local shipowners had no reason to halt the impending exodus. With only two whaleships clearing Sag Harbor in 1849 in quest of whale, many of the others, unrepainted and unpainted, began hauling freight and passengers to San Francisco. Some took the long voyage around the southern tip of South America or through the Straits of Magellan, just north of the Horn, while others went as far as the Isthmus of Panama, there discharging cargoes and passengers to be carried to the Pacific on the new Isthmus Railroad, and thence up the west coast on a line of packets. The South-

ampton and California Trading Company was organized on Long Island to utilize former whaleships in the mad scramble to the gold fields. There was a tremendous demand for building materials and many a shipload of Long Island finished lumber was carried to Frisco at \$60 per ton. Thus the local whaling industry, which had died in 1847, was completely buried by loss of ships and men within a few years.

Brinley D. Sleight, Sag Harbor editor, declared that not less than 800 Long Island whalers started for California in 1849. That landsmen, including a great many carpenters and other artisans, greatly exceeded that number there is little doubt. Southampton town alone lost more than 250 of its unemployed whalers. So large was the exodus from this and East Hampton town that Pastor Copp of the Sag Harbor Presbyterian Church held a special service for these departing citizens and their families and preached a farewell sermon which could well be called a funeral address over the remains of a dead industry.

This church, minus its majestic
Continued on page 13



American Hotel, Sag Harbor, a Relic of Whaling Days

Continued from page 6

It should also mean many more fish and scallops next season.

It is hard to imagine the silence of the outer beach on an October night. Colder weather has killed off the insects with the exception of a tough-skinned cricket or two. The rustle of plume grass sounds like rubbing silk on silk. A dog barks far away and it carries with a false-bottom fullness. A bird peeps in an off-key asking the assurance of the nearness of his pal. Somebody's water pump goes off like a machine gun. Drops of rain hit the sand with a gooey smack. I bet I could hear snow fall in the winter!

Try a weekend on a barrier beach — it is good for the soul.

Continued from page 2

Flushing was the first to get service, in 1854 by a rival railroad, but it was in the late 60's before the railroad system was expanded, when the South Side RR was built, and other lines followed rapidly. Hence in the early days, the LIRR did not occupy as important a part in Island transportation as it did subsequent to 1870, which is one reason why historians did not make much mention of it.

The first attempt at a comprehensive glance at the LIRR may have been made by Richard M. Bayles (author of "Sketches of Suffolk County") who wrote a short history that was published in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle Almanac, and probably revised and reproduced in that annual publication for some years. But the first fairly complete history was written about 1895 by Judge E. B. Hinsdale, Secretary and General Counsel for the Railroad for many years. It was published posthumously in pamphlet form by the Railroad itself in 1898.

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Hinsdale's History is excellent, but sad to say, he made a few curious errors of omission and some of commission. With the records of the company available to him and frequently consulted (these records have since been lost when the L. I. City station and office building burned in 1903) it is hard to see how these errors crept in. Perhaps they are due to the fact that the booklet was published after the Judge had passed away, so he didn't have an opportunity to check the manuscript before publication. Or in some cases, he may have relied upon his memory, which may have failed him as to details due to his age.

I did most of the research for my history in the period 1920-22. I did not dare contradict Hinsdale, whom I regarded as an authority, but I did add a great deal to his story, some from eyewitness accounts given me personally, and some by reading old newspaper accounts of the events described. I also attempted to bring the story up to date, from 1895 to 1922. My history was published in serial form by the Railroad in its "LIRR Information Bulletin", the publicity organ of that time. Unfortunately, they did not publish the last part of the history, covering the electrification and other more recent events. This was a serious oversight, often made by many historians. For example, if a history is written in 1922, they regard the events of 1912-22 (roughly) as

Continued on page 10

Visitors Welcome

The General Museum-Library of the Suffolk County Historical Society, at Riverhead, is open daily (except Sundays and Holidays) from one to five P. M.

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FARMINGDALE, N. Y.

Continued from page 4

Her favorite form of recreation at "Sandy Garth" was horseback riding. Early in her career she won an automobile in an actress popularity contest in New York. Later she traveled in a private chauffeured car, called "Peter Pan," which cost her thirty thousand dollars. Motoring, however, had small appeal for her, and she never learned to drive. What she did revel in was cantering wildly along the bridle paths on her estate or along the country roads on saddle horses that were inclined to be headstrong. When the flush of youth was still upon her, she regularly took matutinal plunges into a small, artificial lake near the house, where she first learned to swim. Before a serious heat stroke, she paddled a canoe out upon the lake and, nestled in the bottom with her head on a red, satin cushion, she read or dreamed away the mid-summer afternoons. She was an avid reader, with a perfect mastery of French, a fair knowledge of Latin, and a better-than-average knowledge of mathematics, history, and economics. She was an expert with a tennis racquet, but she had a golf club in her hand only once in her life. She had little enthusiasm for fashions in dress, and none at all for social gatherings. The friendships she made were few, but close.

In January of 1922 she gave "Sandy Garth" unconditionally to the Sisterhood of Our Lady of the Cenacle. Born of Mormon parents, Miss Adams was not a Catholic and never became one; she was a Christian of no denomination. The gift was a gesture in return for the comfort and solace that she enjoyed with the nuns when she withdrew from the world after a collapse in 1919. Following a severe attack of influenza, she left the stage in 1918 upon the termination of an engagement in "A Kiss for Cinderella" in Atlanta, Georgia. Her proclivity for taciturnity has left published accounts of the cause of this forced withdrawal muddled. Excessive mental depression or a nervous breakdown apparently followed the malady, and she found a place of seclusion and rest among the nuns in the St. Regis Cenacle at 628 West 140th Street in New York City. Among her notes, found after her death, was a sim-

ple tribute to a debt that was so magnanimously requited: "The year when I was seriously ill, your kindness and care I shall never forget."

The estate, then embracing three hundred acres, was valued at \$130,000 when Miss Adams had offered it for sale in 1910. She withdrew it from the market the following spring, however, and enhanced its value by building another house on it, by constructing a large henry, and by planting locust trees on the grounds. When she learned that the Sisterhood's quarters in the New York Cenacle were cramped and that the nuns wanted to extend their work, she offered "Sandy Garth" to them as a gift. She managed the transfer of ownership with such characteristic unobtrusiveness that not even the Frohman Agency suspected it until it was announced in the newspapers on January 17, 1922. The estate was not formally turned over to the nuns until May 31, when Archbishop John Bonzano, the Papal Delegate at Washington, bestowed papal benediction on the presentation in an improvised chapel in the house before about 250 persons. Poor health prevented Miss Adams's making the journey from her other home in the remotest part of fashionable Onteora Park near Tannersville, New York.

The little white house on the estate by the side of the road she retained for herself and Miss Louise Boynton, her friend, secretary, companion, and buffer against unwarranted intrusion. Even after she deeded this, also, to the Cenacle in 1933, she continued to use it.

I do not know what changes have been wrought in the main house on the estate since its conversion to a retreat for the Sisterhood. One wing has probably been altered for religious services. Even under the ownership of Miss Adams, who had a penchant for quaint, Elizabethan architecture, the bungalow was constantly undergoing modifications.

During Miss Adams's tenancy, the house, setting upon a low hill and nestling in a clump of walnut trees, was low and long with a red, mansard roof. It was liberally endowed with windows and verandas. The lower floor was one vast hall, like that in which the heroes of Scotland entertained their royal visitors. Here the family,

comprising in the early days of her ownership her mother and her grandmother, sat and chatted. One end of the hall was reserved as a place to dine. A small kitchen was the actress's only renovation on this one-roomed, lower floor. The upper floor of the half-brick, half-stone structure was divided into a half-dozen large, well-ventilated, sunny bedchambers.

The atmosphere of a cloister pervaded the interior even when it was occupied by Miss Adams, but the nuns who occupy it today may not share their benefactor's preference for candlelight to electricity, nor her preference for wooden shades to drapes. A group of brass candlesticks served Miss Adams in illuminating the darkest, northwestern corner of the hall on the lower floor. Under the subdued candlelight, the green rugs and the bare beams were designed to give the illusion of a forest interior. The nuns, no doubt, have preferred effects less primeval and more monastic.

The greyhounds, St. Bernards, and other dogs that filled overzealous camera fiends with apprehension and greeted visitors with a rollicking welcome have doubtless outlived their usefulness, and the stables probably stand empty. The grove of one thousand walnut trees that Miss Adams planted in 1904 and the twenty-acre apple orchard stand as mute testimony of the industry of their erstwhile owner, who did much more at "Sandy Garth" than frolic or master lines for many of her dramatic roles.

Maude Adams's love for "Sandy Garth" transcended the passage of time and the relinquishment of ownership. When she died at Onteora Park of a heart attack on July 17, 1953, at the age of eighty, she was lowered into ground on the estate she had long cherished. Today her remains lie beside those of her friend for forty-five years, Miss Boynton, and near the retreat of the Order that had offered her a haven when she lived. Just outside the privet hedge bordering the consecrated ground of the Convent's cemetery in a spot surrounded by great oaks and gaunt pines, that reminded some mourners of the setting for the final scene in "Peter Pan," death drew the curtain on a stage celebrity whom

Continued on page 10

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Continued from Page 9

age could not force into retirement. At sixty she had played Portia opposite Otis Skinner in the "Merchant of Venice." She had celebrated her sixty-fifth birthday as a teacher of voice-training courses at Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri. When the end came, she was contemplating television and radio work.

Continued from page 8
"current events" rather than "history". However, the current events of 1922 become the ancient history of 1957 (35 years later) and thus, in writing a history, one should always include the events of recent years, even tho they may be fresh in everyone's mind at the time, for the benefit of those who may come along, 30, 50 or 100 years later.

My history was republished in Hazelton's history in 1925, just as it appeared in the LIRR publication. The second reprinting in the L. I. Railroader in 1952 covered only some of the earlier chapters, and was not complete.

In the last ten years, two younger men who are distantly related to me, have done a great deal of research on old LIRR history in ancient newspapers and magazine files. They have advised me of many of their findings. I hope that some day, the results of their work will appear in print. They have cleared up, by access to old timetables and other old records, some of the mysteries connected with the three railroads to Flushing about which Hinsdale seems to have been confused. Other obscure points have been cleared up.

Felix E. Reifsneider

Frostproof, Florida

(Former Hempstead Historian)

Byram Clocks

Have enjoyed last year's (my first) subscription so much, and have discovered more Byram family history through the Forum. Miss Hazard's article in the October 1956 Forum on Ephriam Byram, Sag Harbor's famous Clock-maker, first brought information that the clock in New York's city hall is a Byram clock and the one in the tower at West Point, also made by him, regulated cadet life there for 88 years.

In 1638 his ancestor left Bridgewater, Mass., with 100 people and settled the town of Mendham, N. J.

Continued next page

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Continued from page 10
from whence all these Byrams originate. The Forum is the friendliest magazine I have ever had the privilege to read. Mrs. Charles William Byram, Howard Beach, N. Y.

That Fire Island Sketch

Re: Fire Island Lighthouse article in November issue: That sketch of the "camp of the engineers and technicians" may have been the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey engineers. In 1834 they measured an accurate line of Fire Island beach as a base for their triangulation system on Long Island. It extended from near the lighthouse, eastward for about seven miles to about Lone Hill. At that time it was customary for them to build a narrow gauge railroad, straight and level for the seven miles. A brass bar, about four inches in diameter and one meter (39") long, was kept packed in ice to maintain a constant temperature. This was placed on a small handcar and the exact length was engraved on copper plates installed along the track at one meter spacing. I believe that the project was completed in 1837.

If you will write to the Director, U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Dept. of Commerce, Washington 25, D. C., he will tell you when the measurement of the base line was started and when completed. He will probably write an article for you on that project if you request it.

I have a blueprint showing the location of the Fire Island Lighthouse. The original tracing was made by Daniel Ewen, city surveyor, April 1825, and copied in the office of the L. H. Board on Dec. 6th, 1872. It is filed with the Coast Guard as "Page 18, No. 121, Dist. 3." It shows the lighthouse located 200 feet northeast of the inlet and Democrat Point only 440 feet west of the lighthouse. At the present time, Democrat Point is over five miles to the west of the lighthouse.

Samuel B. Cross
Westhampton Beach

Recalls 1888 Blizzard

I read with interest your reference to the blizzard of March 12, 1888. I noted that the late Lawrence F. Deutzman of Smithtown, then a boy, lived on West 4th street, New York.

Continued on next page

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Continued from page 11

My family also lived on West 4th street, between Charles and 10th street. Not having any idea of the coming severity of the storm, I was sent to school 35, on 13th street near 6th avenue, as usual. When it got time to come home that afternoon, I had great difficulty, having to hold on to railings and fight my way along through icy wind and deep snow.

It took my father over an hour to make his way from his office at Bond street and Broadway to our home and he arrived at last with his legs wrapped and tied in burlap bags. All that was left on the 4th street horse-car line were a few cars turned over on their sides and covered with snowdrifts.

After the storm was over, side-

walks were cut through the eight to ten feet high drifts. For some time after the blizzard, shopkeepers tried to make a joke of it by putting up signs on the drifts in front of their shops saying "Keep Off the Grass", "Spring is Here," etc.

It is always a great pleasure for me to read the Forum and especially the letters from your correspondents. Frank M. Raynor, Mattituck.

that he does it at least once every trip and it would be far easier to do it on land. Douglas Tuomey, Brightwaters.

Note: Though not an engineer, Mr. Tuomey is one of the editors of a national magazine. Editor.



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1888 Blizzardaire

I feel that I must write you of my memory of the blizzard of 1888. I lived in Brooklyn where the snow was so high against the front of our house that a tunnel was made from our basement door to the opposite side of the street where the snow was not so deep to allow my family to get out.

As a child I found it interesting and enjoyable to go upstairs to the third floor in order to see out of the windows. (Mrs.) Edna B. Ketcham, Babylon.

Sighting by Constellation

I note a letter from Mr. John Klaber, Huntington, in the November Forum, in which he says that as an astronomer and surveyor he can assure us that it is impossible to locate a point by sighting on a constellation, as described in my story in the October issue.

An old friend of mine who is the senior navigator of one of the best airlines, and makes weekly trips to Europe and the Far East, tells me

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Continued from page 7

steeple which Sleight stated was in its day the tallest in America, is now known as the Whalers' Church. Its spire was the principal landmark for incoming and outgoing ships. The steeple was blown down in the hurricane of 1938 and though quite intact where it lay, was never replaced. According to Historian Henry Triglar Weeks, most of its time honored material became firewood for local consumers.

The Iowa, Captain William Howes, was the first Long Island ship to leave for the west coast. With a cargo of lumber and a number of optimistic gold-seekers, she cleared Sag Harbor shortly after New Year's Day of 1849, to be followed on Feb. 3 by the Sabina, Captain Henry Green. Besides lumber and provisions for San Francisco markets, she carried 19 east end whaling skippers in a personnel of some 50 men, each one of whom had invested towards the purchase of the vessel and financing the voyage.

There are Long Islanders today who speak with pride of having an ancestor among these argonauts who have been likened unto the Pilgrim Fathers of 1620. The skippers who went along were Henry Rhodes, chief mate; Thomas E. Warren, second mate; Franklin C. Jessup, William P. Hunting, Job Hedges, Alphonse Boardman, George W. Post, Pythus Concer, John Kellas, Daniel Howell, Nathaniel Post, Charles Crook, James E. Glover, Robert E. Gardiner, Stephen B. French, Watson C. Coney, Absolom S. Griffing, John W. Hull and William S. Bellows.

Other Long Island whalers who joined the argosy and who, notwithstanding their investment, served as needed before the mast were Thomas P. Riley, Jr., Thomas J. Glover, John H. Cook, Augustus Ludlow, William W. Parker, David F. Parker, George Herrick, Andrew L. Edwards, James Rogers, John B. Crook, G. U. Hatch, Theodore H. Wood, Horatio Rogers, Charles Seely, George Howell, C. W.

Howell, John R. Mills, N. B. Rogers and others.

The memorable voyage around the Horn officially began at New York where additional cargo and passengers were taken on, and as might be supposed the departure of the old whaling vessel with its all-captain crew proved a Roman holiday for journalistic humorists and, in lieu of radio or television, vaudeville comedians. The gallant Sabina, nevertheless, weathered the bombardment of early Victorian jokes with the same indifference that she later rounded the Horn, to eventually drop anchor in San Francisco Bay. There, however, she was practically abandoned as her gold-feverish personnel rushed off in quest of pay dirt.

Day after day, month after month, year after year she lay, finally settling into the mud as the city grew up around her. In time her timbers, cut from Long Island trees, became a part of the ground about her remains just as so many Long Islanders became a part of

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the body politic that grew up on the west coast.

The Sabina's fate also befell the local whaleship Niantic. Abandoned in San Francisco Bay in the fall of 1849 by her gold-hungry crew and passengers, she lay near the shore until reclamation operations by the booming city absorbed her Long Island timbers. In the case of this vessel, however, her memory was kept alive by a hostelry being erected over her grave. Named the Niantic Hotel, it stood until recent years as a monument to all those Long Island whaling ships which ended their days along the west coast of America.

The whaling ship Huron, which left Sag Harbor for the Pacific on June 19, 1849, had lain for months on a sand flat near Sag Harbor before being pulled off, patched, painted and sent around Cape Horn with Captain George H. Corwin in command. Barely had she reached San Francisco when Captain Corwin died. Nevertheless, her cargo of Long Island lumber was disposed of at Gold Rush prices and a handsome profit was returned to Oliver R. Wade and his partners in the venture, all residents of eastern Long Island.

The schooner Sierra Nevada, a speedy product of Benjamin Wade's Sag Harbor shipyard, left for California August 28, 1849, taking a number of passengers and a cargo of provisions and lumber. Her

master, Captain Lawrence B. Edwards, of an old east end family, landed his passengers safely at San Francisco, sold the cargo, then sold the ship and, electing to remain a Westerner, became the young city's first superintendent of wharves.

The Cadmus (of Lafayette fame) left Sag Harbor October 20, 1849, commanded by Captain John W. Fordham, and reached 'Frisco Bay only to share the fate of the Sabina and the Niantic. Twenty-five years before, she had carried the Marquis Lafayette from France to New York on his memorable visit to be the guest of honor of the United States in recognition of the French general's services in the Revolution. Captain Fordham left the Cadmus at San Francisco and entered the trans-pacific trade. He never returned to Long Island but died some years later in China.

On October 23, 1849, the Hamilton weighed anchor at Sag Harbor enroute to California which she reached four months later. Here her master, Captain Shamgar H.

Slate gave up his command and joined the China trade, leaving the Hamilton in San Francisco Bay. He too died in China some years later. In the Hamilton's crew was one Edwin Bill who later wrote of his experiences on the voyage west which included a stop at Juan Fernandez Island where he visited the cave made famous in the then recently published story of Robinson Crusoe.

The exodus of Long Island vessels and Long Island whalers from east to far west continued all through the Gold Rush years of 1849 and '50 and as new victims of the "gold fever" acquired outworn whaling ships for several years thereafter they too joined the movement.

Commanded by Captain Nicoll Richard Dering, the Ann Mary Ann cleared Sag Harbor October 27 in the year 1849. At San Francisco Captain "Dick" as he was called, youngest son of Henry P. Dering, who had served as Collector of the Port of Sag Harbor during the ad-

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ministration of President Washington, disposed of ship and cargo and and elected to become a Californian. There he remained, prospering in various fields of business until his death at Magdalena Bay in 1873. He was one of a number of Long Islanders who settled permanently on the west coast and there gave root to family dynasties that today, bearing old Long Island names, are playing an important part in the affairs of California, its towns and cities.

Most of Long Island's Forty-Niners, however, returned east and with few exceptions had little to show beyond experience for their pilgrimage. Among the exceptions was one Thomas Mulford who, having returned to his boyhood home, Patchogue, thereafter lived in ease from moderate wealth acquired in the western gold diggings. Another Mulford, Charles W., of Hempstead, is also said to have amassed a fortune as a Forty-Niner.

During the year 1850 other Long Island whaleships joined the westward procession. On May 1st sailed the schooner Robert Bruce, built at Hunting's shipyard in Sag Harbor and commanded by Captain Richard J. Nichols. Twelve days later the little 48-ton schooner San Diego, a product of Benjamin Wade's east end yard, began its long voyage west. Her master, Captain Jared Wade, however, finding the passage around the Horn too severe for the tiny vessel took her through the Straits of Magellan.

According to the journal of Charles Waite who passed through these straits at about the same time on the brig B. M. Prescott, many a vessel chose this inside route to that of rounding Cape Horn with its "thousands of bergs and the mightiest fields of ice on earth, out-

side the frozen polar seas." The San Diego's voyage from Long Island to the Golden Gate which consumed seven months, was, declared Harry D. Sleight, the longest ever made by an American ship of its size up to that time. But small as she was, the schooner San Diego survived the frenzied Gold Rush days and after nearly three decades of trading in Pacific waters was eventually lost in a storm in Sitka Bay, Alaska, in 1878.

Still another ship to clear Long Island for the west coast during 1850 was the Acasta which had seen long and hard service in whaling. Commanded by Captain J. C. Stratton, she weighed anchor here September 14th with a cargo of general freight and a number of passengers, and neither the ship nor her master ever returned east.

Two years later the schooner Storm, built at Sag Harbor, sailed for California and two years after that the Amelia and the Draco carried passengers and freight bound for San Francisco. The latter, however, altered her plans enroute. Off the coast of Brazil she came upon the brig Parana, abandoned but still seaworthy, and took her in tow, returning to Sag Harbor with her salve-prize. Here, repaired and refitted, the Parana was renamed the Highland Mary and as such sailed the whaling lanes for two decades, bringing satisfactory dividends to her Long Island owners.

Stiles Founded First Daily

A biography of James E. Stiles, founder and publisher of the Nassau Daily Review-Star, Long Is-

land's first daily newspaper outside of Greater New York, is now in the hands of a New York publisher and will appear sometime during 1958.

The biography has been written by Arthur L. Hodges, former editor of the Review-Star and a member of its staff for more than 25 years. There will be about a dozen chapters covering specific phases of Stiles' career which have been contributed by persons closely associated with these activities.

The biography covers the development of Nassau County for the 40 years from 1914, when Stiles entered the newspaper business, to 1953, when the Review-Star was merged with the Long Island Press. It will contain a wealth of Nassau County political history. The book is expected to have more than 700 pages and will contain more than 50 pictures, many of them taken at historical Long Island events for the Review-Star.

"Historic Long Island"

Did enjoy Mr. Bailey's book so much, even though I haven't let you know it until now! Am about ready to read it again, and I know I'll re-read it many times in days to come—it's that kind of a book. We wouldn't be without the Forum. Always read Julian Denton Smith's articles first; they're always interesting. Also have been enjoying Wilbur Corwin's contributions. He used to run the ferry at Bellport when I raced there with my father.

Mrs. William T. Shires
Amityville.

Note: Mrs. Shires is the daughter of Captain Wilbur Ketcham, "the Father of South Bay One-Designers".

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Eaton's Neck Light

Mr. Lott's interesting article about Gilbert Potter in the November issue of the Forum has stirred me to write to him and to you. I have often thought that spies, like Gilbert Potter, going to Huntington from Connecticut may well have used Eaton's Neck as their base. It is near Huntington by boat, and, at the time of the Revolution, belonged to the great patriot, John Sloss Hobart.

I have had in mind to call your attention to two original letters which I ran across recently in the New York Historical Society. Some place on Long Island a record should be kept of their existence. One was from John Gardiner (who owned Eaton's Neck) to Mr. Ebenezer Stevens, dated Huntington, Dec. 19, 1797. It reads, in part:

"Sir, yours of the 13th instant I have received by John McComb And according to your request I have been with him, and examined particularly that part of the Neck which is called Eaton's Neck Reef and have marked out a place which we think the most convenient place for a Lighthouse. Mr. McCoonsic thinks that six Acres of land will be sufficient for the purpose which I think I should be willing to disp . . . (bit torn off) . . . purpose of building a Lighthouse for the consideration of one hundred pounds."

Note that this is the famous architect, John McComb, who also designed Montauk Light, and had much to do with the design and building of New York City Hall. The other letter to the same Ebenezer Stevens Esq. is from John Sloss Hobart, United States Senator from New York State, and is dated Phila. 7th March 1798. It says, in part:

"Inclosed you have the act for the erection of a Lighthouse on Eaton's Neck, it passed the Senate yesterday with the amendments noted in the margin which will be

**Eaton's Neck Lighthouse**

agreed to by the House of Representatives this morning. I take this early opportunity to apprise you of it that measures may be taken to obtain from the Legislature of our State the necessary . . . (illegible word) . . . of jurisdiction during this present session."

(Miss) Mary Voyse
Eaton's Neck

Note: Miss Voyse's history of Eaton's Neck (1956) was excellently done.—Editor.

We have read Mr. Bailey's splendid book "Historic Long Island" with genuine pleasure and find it, as have so many others, entertaining and informative—a unique combination. Marion Morris, Mineola.

I want you to know I am enjoying the Forum very much and look forward to each issue as it brings back so many memories. Mrs. Maurice S. French, Islip.

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Huntington's Historic Brook

Huntington's first lay-preacher of record was Henry Whitney who held meetings at various homes between 1653 and 1657 when the Rev. William Leverich was engaged as the first minister.

On Oct. 2nd, 1663 at Town Meeting, "Caleb Cornell and Thos. Skidmore were chosen to make the rate of pay for the house was boute of Mr. Leverige". This was the beginning of the first church building. It was placed on Meeting House Brook where it was used until March 18th, 1714. Then after much controversy a new place of worship was built farther east on the crest of the hill where the present structure stands. The old building was sold May 7, 1717 to Jonas Platt Jr. for 5 lbs. 2 shillings.

That first church was for many years the only one in the entire Township which until 1872 extended from Long Island Sound south to the Atlantic. Folks from the south came over to the Huntington settlement on Sundays, and the last leg of their twenty-mile journey followed the course of the lively brook to the Meeting House. Thus the stream received its name.

May 5th, 1761 "It was voted and agreed by the Trustees of Huntington that Jacob Brush should have the liberty to build a sump Mill in the Meeting house Brook . . .".

Again that stream received public recognition when on May 14th, 1810, the Trustees convened at the house of Platt and "Resolved that we approve of the conduct of the inhabitants of the western part of said town in erecting a fleu on the run of water opposite the house of Mr. Prime for the purpose of washing sheep therein".

When on Sept. 18th, 1890, the Huntington Water Works Co. filed a request to construct Huntington's first commercial water system, the proposed source of water was from "Springs at or near the stream of water which flows northerly" and Meeting House Brook served the town once more. Eventually a new pumping station was built farther north, but the original building still stands and is used as a store-room and office.

Another period passed during which steam-driven machinery superseded the use of waterpower. Roads with signposts replaced the footpath alongside the stream while gradual erosion, man-made fill and culverts obliterated that faithful flow of water so that nowhere could it be seen in its natural course.

But Meeting House Brook was

not to be denied. About 1904 a builder selected for his homesite a spot near the path of its original run. In digging a well the builder gave the old stream a new outlet and it surged forth with such vengeance that an overflow was installed to carry off the surplus into a catch-basin. Here townspeople still come to fill their pails and bottles from the brook that would not die and which today provides the purest water obtainable at a constant year-round temperature.

Meeting House Brook has indeed played an important part in the history of Huntington village. In early times it guided good people to church; it powered the mill that ground the people's grain into flour; it cleansed their bodies, quenched their thirst and conditioned their livestock. Like Tennyson's Brook, it seemingly "flows on forever," for after three centuries it is still providing service to the people of Huntington. Roy E. Lott
Huntington Town Historian

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Daisy Mae Goes To Traphagen

The beautiful blonde who arrives like a whirlwind when the evening Design Class meets at Traphagen School of Fashion is Edith Adams, a girl with no time on her hands. She has a definite flair for smart clothes and wants to capitalize on it — therefore her attendance at Traphagen. Besides starring in the smash-hit musical, "Li'l Abner," there are television shows and rehearsals waiting in line to encroach on Edie's leftover hours. However, she is a girl who'll manufacture time if she wants to do something badly enough, and that's exactly what she had to do when she chose to study at Traphagen. Edie obtained special permission to arrive late in her dressing room and, leaving class a little early, she dashes

from Traphagen School at 1680 Broadway near 52nd Street, and rushes through the stage door at the St. James Theatre in the nick of time to transform herself into "Daisy Mae" before the overture is finished.

Since she set New York talking as "Eileen" in the musical, "Wonderful Town," four years ago, Edie was absent from Broadway until her new show opened, but she was frequently seen on television with her husband, comedian Ernie Kovacs, and appeared in supper clubs. Edith Adams came from Kingston, Pennsylvania, ambitious to sing in opera, but the theatre recognized her talents first. With her fashion design course at Traphagen, she's busy now collecting another asset which might mean stardom someday in still another artistic field.

Wants a Book

The articles of Julian Denton Smith, such as When Summer Leaves the Beach, in the November Forum, are very much to my taste.

If any collection of them has been made I should be glad to know of it and where it may be procured.

If none exists I hope Mr. Smith will consider making one.

His articles arouse one's interest in the natural history of Jones Beach. Lewis A. Eldridge, Jr., M.D., Rensselaerville, N. Y.

I enjoy the Forum very much and I pass it along to six others here, three of whom were formerly Long Islanders. Mrs. Mary P. L'Homme, Norwalk, Ct.

REVEREND HORTICULTURIST

Two firsts at East Hampton, on the authority of Dr. Lyman Beecher pastor there eleven years, 1799 to 1810, and his daughter Catherine:

"Mine", wrote Beecher in his autobiography, "was the first orchard in East Hampton. People had had the impression that fruit would not do well so near the salt water, and laughed when they saw me setting out trees. It was not long, however, before others, seeing how well my orchard was thriving, began to set out trees. The wood-piles were cleared away from the street in front of the houses, and door-yards made pretty, and shade-trees set out." In May, 1802 he had "planted my apple-seeds, and set out more trees and begun to plant my garden."

Catherine remembered that nursery. "How strange it seemed to me, when I was a child to see you work so hard on those grafted young trees that looked like bare poles and stubs covered with plaster."

The other first in East Hampton was a piano brought by Eleanor Lawless, a boarder student from Honduras in Mrs. Beecher's parsonage school conducted to eke out the preacher's \$400 yearly stipend, which the villagers would not increase. Eleanor was "as wild and untamed as her name and nativity would indicate." She "was too lawless," said Catherine, "to be controlled. She roamed about the villages and shores, wild as a partridge, keeping the whole family in a state of anxiety about her, till at last there being no prospect of civilizing her, she was sent back to her friends."



Edith Adams, Star of "Li'l Abner," in Class at Traphagen

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Griffing Story Thrilled

Each issue of the Forum brings
many interesting facts about Long
Island. But when a familiar name
appears, the facts become thrills.

The last six lines on the back of
the October issue written by Mrs.
Torry of Jamaica really warmed
the cockles of my heart. She referred
to the account of Rev. Rowley's
fishing trip reported by Capt.
Eugene S. Griffing in the August
Forum.

I still have the picture father
took of the fishing party grouped
in front of Capt. Frank Tuthill's
fishing shack. "Gene" Griffing is
in it as father's guest, who incidentally
was his brother-in-law, John Lasher of Broadalbin, N. Y.
Uncle John used to act as fishing
companion to the late novelist Robert
W. Chambers, a summer resident
of Broadalbin.

Mother once told me that Uncle
John wore two shirts when he
came for that glimpse of L. I.
fishing so as not to be burdened
with luggage. Father said Uncle
John was not much help in trans-
ferring the fish from the nets to
the boat as the fish did not behave
like a spadeful of dirt or a forkful
of hay.

The fact that father is remem-
bered after fifty years means much
to me as he was just a simple
old-fashioned preacher from up-
state who learned to love Long Is-
land and his fisherfolk parishioners.

Marion A. Rowley
43 Jackson St.
Binghamton, N. Y.

It is with pleasure I renew my
subscription to your interesting
periodical. We would be lost with-
out it and pass it on to an equally
interested party. Mrs. Florence M.
Schwarting, Westhampton.

If you do start a Clamdiggers'
organization, I am interested as a
native of this village. Austin I.
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